

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8623

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 11758

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINS, TH, RP

SUBJECT: RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN THAILAND

1. RECENT EVENTS IN THAILAND HAVE SENT A DISCERNIBLE SHIVER THROUGH PHILIPPINE LEADERSHIP. SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ARE EXPRESSING UNDISGUISED CONCERN, AND ARE PERPLEXED BY SUDDEN COLLAPSE OF THAI MILITARY GOVERNMENT.

2. EVEN PRIOR TO WEEKEND DEVELOPMENTS IN BANGKOK, PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT HAD SHOWN SOME NERVOUSNESS ABOUT POTENTIAL PROBLEMS ON LOCAL UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES. THIS WAS LARGELY AS A RESULT OF REPORTS OF STUDENT ACTION IN KOREA, RATHER THAN AS REFLECTION OF LOCAL AGITATION. MOST OF STUDENT LEADERSHIP WHICH HAD PROVIDED ACTIVISM PRIOR TO DECLARATION MARTIAL LAW REMAINS UNDER DETENTION
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(WE ESTIMATE 700 STUDENTS STILL DETAINED) AND GOVERNMENT

SECURITY MEASURES REMAIN STRICT. (WHEN I VISITED LOS BANOS CAMPUS OCTOBER 9, I NOTICED NEWLY ARRIVED PLATOON OF CONSTABULARY TROOPS, IN FULL BATTLE GEAR.)

3. ALTHOUGH PHILIPPINE UNIVERSITIES ARE IN MIDDLE OF EXAM PERIOD AND OUTDOOR ACTIVITY IS CONSIDERABLY HAMPERED BY TYPHOON SEASON, PRESIDENT MARCOS HAS PUBLICLY (OCTOBER 12) CALLED FOR VIGILANCE BY UNIVERSITY AUTHORITIES TO PREVENT SUBVERSIVE ACTION BY "RADICAL ELEMENTS", AND INTELLIGENCE REPORTS INDICATE THAT POLICE INFORMANT SYSTEM AMONG STUDENTS HAS BEEN EXPANDED TO NEW DIMENSIONS.

4. ONE MEASURE OF SENSITIVITY TO STUDENT POTENTIAL IS DECISION TAKEN BY TOP LEVEL GOP COMMITTEE OCTOBER 15 TO REFER QUESTION OF PETROLEUM PRODUCT PRICE INCREASES TO CABINET LEVEL BEFORE PUTTING THEM INTO EFFECT. THAI SITUATION WAS CITED TO U.S. OIL EXECUTIVES AS REASON FOR CABINET REVIEW, AND DECISION BASED IN LARGE PART ON FACT THAT STUDENT LEADERS PROVIDED CATALYST TO STRIKES AND DEMONSTRATIONS BY JEEPNEY DRIVERS AGAINST PREVIOUS PRICE INCREASE ANNOUNCEMENT IN JAN-FEB 1971.

5. MANILA, OF COURSE, CONTAINS ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST CONCENTRATIONS OF UNIVERSITY-LEVEL STUDENT POPULATIONS, ESPECIALLY IN RELATIONSHIP TO OVERALL INHABITANTS OF THE GREATER MANILA AREA. ESTIMATES ARE THAT APPROXIMATELY 400,000 OUT OF THE TOTAL 4,000,000 POPULATION OF THE BAY AREA ARE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS. AS IN BANGKOK (OR PARIS, OR SEOUL, OR WASHINGTON) THESE STUDENTS ARE DRAWN FROM ALL SOCIAL LEVELS AND POSSESS CAPACITY FOR WIDESPREAD DISRUPTION. AN ESTIMATED 3,000 THAI STUDENTS ARE IN MANILA AND OTHER EDUCATIONAL CENTERS OF THE PHILIPPINES. FACT THESE STUDENTS HAVE NOT YET DEMONSTRATED ORGANIZATIONAL CAPABILITIES OF THEIR THAI COLLEAGUES AND ARE TODAY UNDER TIGHT CONTROL DOES NOT DIMINISH GOP'S RESPECT FOR POLITICAL MUSCLE THEY DEMONSTRATED IN 1970 AND 1971.

6. ALTHOUGH MILITARY AND POLICE CONTROL MECHANISM HAS DEMONSTRATED CAPABILITY TO HANDLE DEMONSTRATIONS OF TYPE EXPERIENCED PRIOR 1972, IT WOULD BE HARD PRESSED TO COPE
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WITH ANYTHING OF DIMENSIONS COMPARIBLE TO BANGKOK EXPERIENCE. WE MAY ANTICIPATE, THEREFORE, THAT MARTIAL LAW AUTHORITIES WILL CONCENTRATE THEIR EFFORTS ON PRE-EMPTING ANY SIGNIFICANT STUDENT GATHERINGS, AND MAY ASSUME THAT KNOWN STUDENT LEADERS CURRENTLY IN DETENTION WILL STAY THERE FOR SOME TIME TO COME. CONTROL OVER STUDENTS SO FAR IS RELATIVELY SEVERE AND EFFECTIVE.

7. IN MEANTIME, GOVERNMENT IS MAKING NO RPT NO EFFORT TO SUPPRESS NEWS OF BANGKOK EVENTS, WHICH ARE REPORTED FACTUALLY BY PRESS, RADIO, AND TELEVISION. THEY ARE, HOWEVER, BEING KEPT OFF THE FRONT PAGES AND BEING HANDLED IN A LOWER KEY THAN THEY INTRINSICALLY DESERVE.

8. WE HAVE BEEN BRIEFING PHIL GOVT. ON BASIS CABLES DEPT. HAS HELPFULLY REPEATED TO US. JUST PRIOR TODAY'S CABINET MEETING, WE TOLD ACTING FOREIGN SECRETARY COLLANTES THAT PRESENT THAI GOVERNMENT WAS NOT RPT NOT RADICAL ONE, AND STRESSED THAT KING REPRESENTED STABILITY, CONTINUITY AND ESSENTIALLY CONSERVATIVE POLICY BIAS WHICH WOULD HELP MAINTAIN TRADITIONAL THAI OUTLOOK ON FOREIGN POLICY MATTERS. PHIL AMBASSADOR YAN HAS BEEN ORDERED TO RETURN IMMEDIATELY FROM UNGA TO BANGKOK IN ORDER PROVIDE MANILA WITH INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT OF EVENTS.
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